



## **Australian Education Union**

### **Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs Inquiry into Educational Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students**

**December 2015**

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## Introduction

The Australian Education Union (AEU) represents more than 186,000 members employed in public primary, secondary and special schools and the early childhood, TAFE and adult provision sectors as teachers, educational leaders, education assistants or support staff across Australia.

We appreciate the opportunity to present this submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs Inquiry into key aspects of educational opportunities and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students up to school leaving age.

### *The AEU's Longstanding Commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education*

The AEU has a longstanding strong commitment to improving educational opportunities and outcomes for all students, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander [ATSI] students, from pre to post school education.

ATSI students are overwhelmingly educated in the public sector. In the schooling sector, ATSI students comprise around 5% of the overall school student population. Public schools educate around 84% of all ATSI students; 6.5% of students have an ATSI background, compared to around 2% in private schools.<sup>1</sup>

It is crucial to the wellbeing of all communities, particularly for Indigenous communities in regional and remote Australia, that the public education system in all states and territories provides access to quality, culturally appropriate pre-school and school education and strives for equitable outcomes for all students.

As a measure of our commitment to these goals, AEU campaigns include:

- universal access to high quality Early Childhood Education for Indigenous three and four year old children;
- mandatory Indigenous Studies for pre-service and in-service teachers;
- improved professional learning for principals and school leaders in the area of Indigenous education;
- improved staffing models for schools with large cohorts of Indigenous students;
- improved employment condition and career pathways for ATSI teachers, education workers and principals;
- significantly improved funding models with levels of funding sustainable over the long-term; and

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<sup>1</sup> SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision) 2015, Report on Government Services 2015, Productivity Commission, Canberra. Table 4A.29

- improved school infrastructure and teacher accommodation.

The AEU also lobbies for the maintenance of a high quality, publicly funded TAFE system that can continue to meet the diverse post-school needs of ATSI students and their communities.

### *The Gap in Outcomes for Indigenous Students*

Despite the best intentions and efforts of countless individuals and organisations, the gaps in educational access, opportunity and outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children, students and young people across Australia remain.

The 2015 ‘Close the Gap’ report and work by the Productivity Commission highlight the lack of progress in improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literacy and numeracy education outcomes in general. Four of the seven ‘Closing the Gap’ targets are in the education area, and in the seven years since the targets were set by the Council of Australian Governments there have been several positive outcomes,<sup>2</sup> but progress has been largely unsatisfactory.

- ATSI students are still an average of two to three years behind their non-Indigenous peers in literacy and numeracy.
- The school attendance rate between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students widens as children age and tends to be more significant in remote and very remote areas.
- Only 55% ATSI young people complete Year 12.
- Young ATSI people are 24 times more likely to be in detention than non-Indigenous young people.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The 2015 ‘Closing the Gap’ report notes that the only gains have been (1) From 2013 to 2014, a 13% rise in attendance across 29 Northern Territory schools and an 8% rise in the number of children attending 11 Queensland schools targeted under the Remote Schools Attendance Strategy; and (2) Indigenous enrolments in higher education institutions increased 53% over the decade to 2013.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Change the Record’ statistics indicate that the Indigenous Imprisonment rate, at 58.5 per cent in 10 years, is higher than the school retention rate to Year 12 of 46.5 per cent.

**Table 1. Progress towards educational ‘Closing the Gap’ targets**

Target	Progress
Ensuring access for all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities to early childhood education by 2013.	Not met. In 2013 85% of Indigenous four year olds were enrolled compared to the target of 95%.
Close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance.	Little progress. Declining Year 10 attendance for Indigenous students 2007-2013. Year 5 Indigenous attendance stable. 48% of metro schools achieving 90% Indigenous attendance benchmark; provincial 44%; remote 21%; very remote 14%.
Halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievement for Indigenous students by 2018.	No statistically significant improvement in proportion of ATSI students in Years 3,5,7 and 9 in meeting NAPLAN minimum national standards in these areas 2008 - 2014. In 2014 only 35 per cent of Indigenous students in very remote areas met or exceeded the National Minimum Standards for Year 7 reading. Results for non-Indigenous students show less variation by area remoteness, but for Indigenous students the gap is much wider in remote areas than in metropolitan areas.
Halve the gap for Indigenous Australians aged 20-24 in Year 12 attainment rates by 2020.	On track. 2008 rate was 45%; by 2013 58.5% compared to 85% among non-Indigenous population.

Source: Australian Government (2015) Closing the Gap: Prime Minister’s Report

The most recent NAPLAN report (December 2015)<sup>4</sup> shows that at the national level there continues to be little if any progress in closing the gaps for reading and numeracy. Indigenous students continue to score significantly lower reading and numeracy results than their non-Indigenous peers.

- Just 6 per cent of non-Indigenous students failed to reach the national minimal standard across reading and writing, compared to at least 18 per cent of Indigenous students.
- Indigenous students in remote and very remote locations are being significantly outperformed by non-Indigenous students and students living in metropolitan locations. Between 40 and 60 percent of Indigenous children in very remote locations across WA, SA and the NT are achieving below the minimum standard in Year 3 reading.
- In the Northern Territory, where 44 per cent of all Indigenous students living in very remote Australia are located, 51 per cent of Indigenous students achieved below the national minimum standard in numeracy.

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<sup>4</sup> 2015 NAPLAN National Report. Available at [http://www.nap.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/2015\\_NAPLAN\\_national\\_report.pdf](http://www.nap.edu.au/verve/_resources/2015_NAPLAN_national_report.pdf)

- Around 61 per cent of Indigenous students in the NT achieved below the national minimum standard in spelling, grammar and punctuation.<sup>5</sup>

The OECD's latest Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey of the capabilities of 15 year old students found that:

- Indigenous students had a mean maths score of 417 compared to 507 for non-Indigenous students.
- 51% of Indigenous students were at or below PISA's proficiency level 1 compared to 18% for non-Indigenous students. (NB. PISA considers students who do not reach level 2 (of 6) proficiency lack the skills and knowledge required to adequately participate in the 21st century workforce and contribute as productive citizens).
- Indigenous students had a mean reading score of 428 compared to 515 for non-Indigenous students.
- 39% of Indigenous students were at or below PISA's proficiency level 1 for reading compared to 13% for non-Indigenous students.
- The mean score difference for reading represents more than one proficiency level or two and a half years of schooling.<sup>6</sup>

### ***The Importance of Resourcing***

In the current political environment it has become increasingly common to hear that 'throwing money at seemingly recalcitrant problems is not the solution' and countless variations on that theme.

The AEU does not argue that 'more money' is the only solution. Rather, that meeting the diverse range of needs of ATSI students across Australia, particularly those in rural, remote and very remote communities, requires a fully-resourced expansion of educational opportunities and models of delivery.

'Closing the Gap' remains largely unattainable unless a complex range of deeply entrenched geographical, cultural and socio-economic factors are addressed:

*Closing the gap in education is intrinsically linked to multiple aspects of socioeconomic disadvantage, including access to quality health, employment, incarceration rates and housing. These combine to form the social determinants of educational success.<sup>7</sup>*

This is resource-intensive, and cannot be achieved in a political environment where actions by Federal, State and Territory governments undermine and diminish their responsibility for

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<sup>5</sup> NAPLAN National Report 2015; Indigenous Literacy Foundation, 'Indigenous Literacy – a snapshot', 2015. Available at <https://www.indigenouliteracyfoundation.org.au/what-is-indigenous-literacy.html>; SBS, 'Indigenous education gap stands out in latest NAPLAN results', 8 December 2015. Available at <http://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/2015/12/02/indigenous-education-gap-stands-out-latest-naplan-results>

<sup>6</sup> Thomson, S., De Bortoli, L. & Buckley, S. (2013) *PISA 2012: How Australia measures up*. Australian Council for Educational Research

<sup>7</sup> Stewart Riddle and Bill Fogarty, 'Closing the Gap in education report card: needs improvement', The Conversation, 11 February 2015

the provision of long-term sustainable public services. Equity for disadvantaged students cannot be achieved unless a high priority is given to addressing the achievement gaps which confront ATSI children.

This was a central recognition of the Gonski schools funding review. Gonski clearly identified the critical importance of Federal, State and Territory governments working cooperatively to deliver a needs-based funding system that guarantees every school the resources required to meet the needs of their students. In order to address disadvantage, it called for schools to receive additional funding through loadings to support Indigenous students, students who attend regional, remote or small schools, students who have English as a second (or third) language, students who come from a low socio-economic background, and students with a disability/special needs.

Because public schools do the heavy lifting when it comes to educating the students with the greatest need,<sup>8</sup> including the 84 per cent of Indigenous students who attend them, they would be the biggest beneficiaries of the increased funding that would flow from the implementation of Gonski.

Gonski also recognised the complex issue of compounding disadvantage which is particularly pertinent to Indigenous students, many of whom have the greatest needs due to a combination of these factors. Gonski, fully implemented, would see many ATSI students eligible for more than one of the loadings. Schools need full Gonski funding to ensure all ATSI students receive the education they need to achieve their full potential.

This is why the AEU has campaigned so strongly for the implementation of the key Gonski recommendations, and the full six years of Gonski funding to ensure all schools meet minimum resource standards. It is why we are so opposed to the Coalition Government's retreat from its election commitments:

- its abandonment of years five and six of the Gonski needs based funding model, which will effectively cut \$2.8 billion from public schools alone;
- the fact that the agreements between the Abbott Government and the governments of NT and WA, which have high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, do not require the additional funding to be delivered to schools on a needs basis or used to tackle disadvantage; and
- cuts in schools funding.

This has been a particularly bitter blow for Indigenous education. There had been cause for hope that the long-standing gaps in access and outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students associated with the resourcing gaps between schools and communities would go at least some way to being closed with the implementation of the Gonski needs-

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<sup>8</sup> Public schools educate the majority of children from disadvantaged and high-needs backgrounds: around 80% of students in the lowest quartile of socio-economic disadvantage; 84% of Indigenous students; 78% of students with a funded disability; 83% of students in remote/very remote areas. The majority of students with English language difficulties, for example over 90% of students in the ESL New Arrivals Program, attend public schools.

based funding reforms. We see little chance of closing these gaps without permanent needs-based resourcing of the schools Indigenous students attend and ensuring needs-based funding measures in all states and territories.

We remain hopeful that recent comments by new Prime Minister Malcom Turnbull endorsing the Gonski Review's need-based approach and acknowledging funding indicate a move away from the hard-line retreat from a national approach to needs-based funding by the Abbott Government. Such a move would be consistent with the national and international evidence on the social, educational and economic importance of addressing equity. In April 2013 the OECD's *Education Policy Australia Outlook: Australia* noted that a major economic and educational challenge facing Australia was the need "to reduce inequities between students from different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds by tackling system-level policies which hinder equity in education"<sup>9</sup>, while the most recent OECD Education Policy Outlook (January 2015) confirmed that this remains a challenge:

*Australia's high education performance can be complemented with further focus on reducing inequities by tackling system-level policies hindering equity in education. Other important issues are strengthening incentives for attaining skills demanded by the labour market and increasing access to education and performance of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.*<sup>10</sup>

Within this context the Inquiry needs to be aware that the broken promise of substantially increased funding for students with disability from 2015 and abandonment of Gonski post-2017 impacts disproportionately on Indigenous students, given the high rates of disability in young Indigenous people. Recent ABS data shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0–14 years were more than twice as likely as non-Indigenous children to have a disability (15.2% compared with 6.6%).<sup>11</sup>

### ***The Impact of Recent Funding Cuts***

These developments have been exacerbated by the Coalition Government's failure to prevent states and territories from using additional Commonwealth funding as an opportunity to cut their own school expenditure. As a result Indigenous students have been denied the full benefit of the additional funding that the Gonski Review found their schools need to provide them with a quality education.

### ***Northern Territory***

How this has played out for Indigenous students is best illustrated in the Northern Territory, which has the highest proportion of Indigenous students in the nation, the vast majority of whom (81%) are educated in public schools. Under the needs-based architecture of the Gonski funding model, and its recognition of the compounding effects of multiple

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<sup>9</sup> OECD, 'Education Policy Australia Outlook: Australia', April 2013. p6

<sup>10</sup> OECD (2015), *Education Policy Outlook 2015: Making Reforms Happen*, OECD Publishing. <http://www.oecd.org/edu/education-policy-outlook-2015-9789264225442-en.htm>

<sup>11</sup> ABS, Catalogue 4433.0.55.005, 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People with a Disability, 2012', released 01/12/2014

disadvantage, schools enrolling high proportions of Indigenous students were set to receive some of the largest funding increases.

Commonwealth Government projections published in 2013 show that schools serving Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory would have received large funding increases over the six year transition:

- Shepherdson College –73% funding increase
- Yuendumu School –60%
- Umbakumba School –86%
- Alekarenge School – 68%
- Docker River –110%
- Borroloola, a mining town with a majority Indigenous population – 92%.<sup>12</sup>

Following the Coalition Government’s decision to provide additional funding to states and territories which had not entered into Gonski funding agreements with the Commonwealth, then Federal Education Minister Pyne outlined to the NT Education Minister in a letter dated 10/12/2013 that the territory would receive an additional \$272.5 million to spend on government schools in the years 2014-2017. The letter also stated the money was provided under the expectation that “your Government would continue its funding effort across schools in the Northern Territory through the forward estimates period.”

This has not happened. Rather, while receiving additional federal money for its public schools, the NT Government has actually cut funding to them. As can be seen in the following table, NT budget allocations to government schools have fallen by \$28 million, or 4.7% in per student terms, between 2012-13 and the current financial year. Meanwhile, government funding to private schools has ballooned way ahead of any enrolment growth by \$39 million, or nearly 12% per student.

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<sup>12</sup> Clark, M. op.cit.



**Table 2. Northern Territory Budget outlays to schools comparison, 2012-13 and 2015-16**

	2012-13 (\$000) <sup>1</sup>	2015-16 (\$000) <sup>2</sup>	Change %
Government Schools	626,484,	597,911	-4.6%
-Primary	365,501	356,274	-2.5%
-Middle years			+2.1%
-Senior years	129,636	132,352	-16.8%
	131,347	109,285	
Total gov. school enrolments <sup>3</sup>	29,869	29,924	+0.2%
\$ per gov. school student	20.974 (\$000)	19.981 (\$000)	-4.7%
Non-Government Schools	161,497	200,564	+24%
-Primary	76,662	95,518	+25%
-Middle years			+28%
-Senior years	51,628	66,155	17%
	33,207	38,891	
Total non-gov. school enrolments <sup>3</sup>	10,590	11,777	+11%
\$ per non-gov. school student	15.249	17.030	+11.7%

1. 2013-14 NT Budget Papers. Estimate for 2012-13

2. 2015-16 NT Budget Papers

3. NT school enrolment figures from respective budget papers

This diversion of money meant for NT Government schools is nothing less than an outrage and we consider it is incumbent on this inquiry to take it into consideration, given that it provides a budgetary context for some of the significant issues contained within its terms of reference.

### ***Western Australia***

Western Australia also has an above average proportion of Indigenous students (6.4%, of which 84% are enrolled in the public sector).<sup>13</sup> They too have been adversely affected by the failure to ensure that additional Gonski money reaches public schools.

As another non-signatory to the previous Federal Government's funding deal, WA was promised an additional \$120.3 million by then Minister Pyne in a letter dated 10/12/13 to the WA Minister for Education. This letter also outlined an expectation that the West Australian Government would "continue its funding effort across all schools in WA through the forward estimates period."

On the contrary, the following year saw the WA Government:

- cut over \$200 million directly from school budgets;
- cut over 600 teaching positions;
- cut 110 Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEOs); and

<sup>13</sup> Productivity Commission. (2015) Report on Government Services. Table 4A.29

- changes to the way in which Education Assistants are allocated to schools resulting in the loss of hundreds of positions.<sup>14</sup>

School budgets have been spread thinner as the WA Government has failed to match funding to enrolment levels. Remarkably, despite the state receiving an additional \$120 million for the period 2014-2017, West Australian funding per government school secondary student declined in 2014 and 2015.<sup>15</sup> There is no evidence that the additional money the state received to lift school funding has served its intended purpose.

Disregard for the work of AIEOs has undermined the vital role these officers play in the school and the community; maximising attendance, looking after students' welfare in and out of school and acting as liaison between schools and Indigenous communities. In the Kimberley region alone 20 positions were axed.<sup>16</sup>

The consequences of these budgetary policy decisions are compounded by the fact that the additional resources the Gonski Review identified as necessary to support Indigenous students do make a real difference where they flow through to the school level, as outlined below.

### ***National Partnerships Funding***

In the years leading up to the passing of the Australian Education Act, additional funding to target disadvantage and low achievement was made available through a series of National Partnership Agreements (NPAs), including:

- the National Partnership on Improving Teacher Quality;
- the National Partnership on Low SES School Communities; and
- the National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy.

A 2014 evaluation by Parkville Global Advisory found Northern Territory primary schools funded under the Low SES NPA experienced superior NAPLAN score growth relative to other similar schools as seen in Figure 1.

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<sup>14</sup> Putting Our Kids First. (2015) 2015/16 State Budget Submission. p.4  
[https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/puttingourkidsfirst/pages/199/attachments/original/1426575272/Putting\\_Our\\_Kids\\_First\\_2015\\_State\\_Budget\\_Submission.pdf?1426575272%20](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/puttingourkidsfirst/pages/199/attachments/original/1426575272/Putting_Our_Kids_First_2015_State_Budget_Submission.pdf?1426575272%20)

<sup>15</sup> Government of Western Australian (2015) Budget Paper No.2 (Vol. 1) p. 260

<sup>16</sup> Putting Our Kids First. op.cit.

**Figure 1. Proportion of students in Low SES NP schools who achieved above average NAPLAN growth between Years 3 and 5 compared to that of students in non-NP schools with similar socioeconomic backgrounds, NT Government and Catholic Sectors<sup>17</sup>**

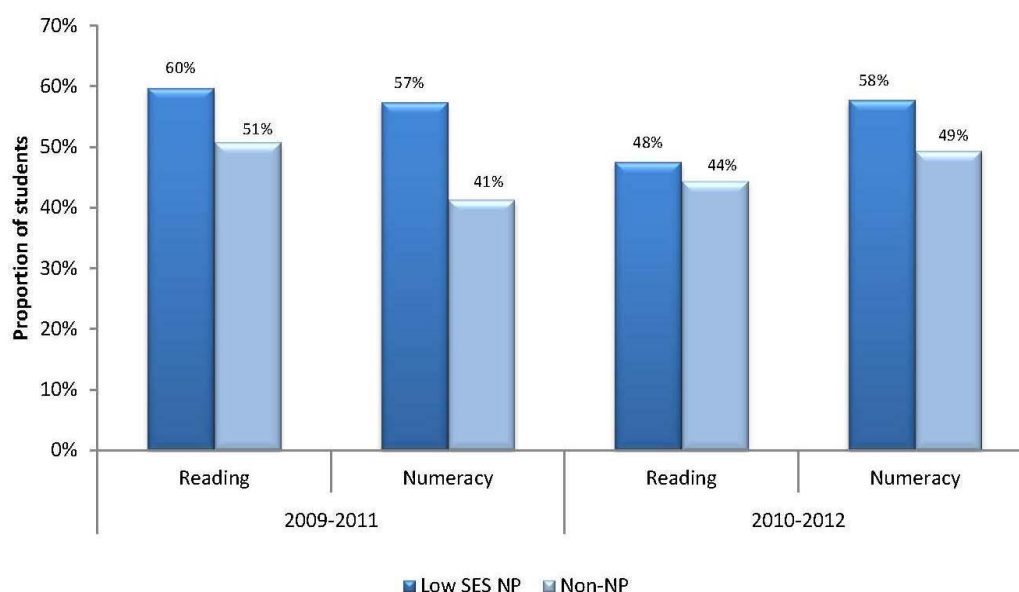
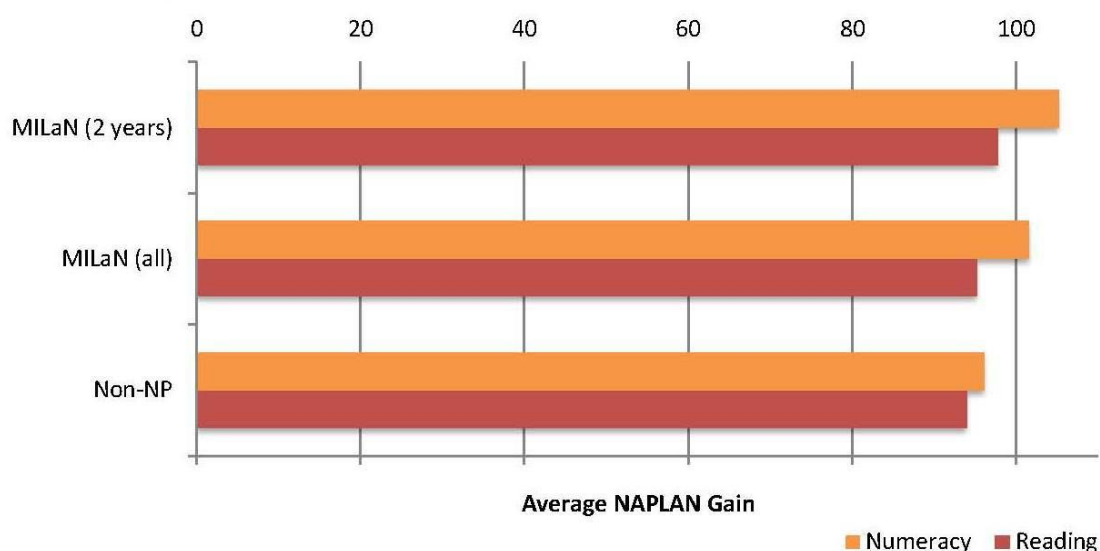


Figure 2 shows participation in the Maximising Improvements in Literacy and Numeracy (MILaN) initiative, funded through the Literacy and Numeracy NPA, was associated with greater improvement in NAPLAN scores.

**Figure 2. Average achievement gains for students participating in MILaN – Year 3 2009 to Year 5 2011, NT<sup>18</sup>**



<sup>17</sup> Parkville Global Advisory (2014). National Evaluation for the Low SES National Partnership and the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership - Impact Stage Final Report. Figure 3.1.

<sup>18</sup> Source: Parkville Global Advisory (2014). National Evaluation for the Low SES National Partnership and the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership - Impact Stage Final Report. Figure 3.4

In general, the evaluation noted that observed improvements were found to be greater for Indigenous students than non-Indigenous students.

The report also highlighted a number of schools where NP participation was associated with improved outcomes as outlined in Table 3.

**Table 3. Experience of selected National Partnership schools, Northern Territory**

School	Initiatives funded	Outcomes
Bradshaw Primary School, Alice Springs	-Literacy & numeracy intervention programs Quicksmart and Gateways Oral language - Irrkerlantye support program bus services, showers, uniforms, breakfast, medical and hearing treatment.	-Smart schools Award finalist for literacy and numeracy  -NAPLAN results increasing across the board with Yr 5 reading increasing the number of students at or above NMS every year of NP participation.
Alyangula Area School, Groote Eylandt	Employed full-time coordinator & data analyst to deliver Quicksmart skills program to targeted students.	Targeted group demonstrated attainment gains 32% higher than comparison group
Elliot School	Home liaison officer to boost enrolment & attendance.	Average attendance grew from 60% in 2009 to 72.1% in 2010
MacFarlane Primary School, Katherine	Employed Indigenous Cultural Coordinator to provide Indigenous studies, mentor and engage the community.	Greater engagement, attendance up from 61.7% in 2009 to 71.6% in 2010.
Milner Primary School, Darwin area	Education of remote Indigenous children in urban settings (ERICUS) to promote engagement, attendance, raise achievement.	Attendance increased from 33% in 2008 to 80% in 2011. Reading assessment showed major improvement
Barkly Region	Barkly Deadly Readers – Three literacy and numeracy coaches supporting leaders and classroom teachers.	25% of students improved reading by minimum of two PM benchmarks in 2010. Yr 3 & 5 NAPLAN results improved
Jingili Primary School, Darwin area	Transition to Year 6 spelling and grammar program.	Yr 3 & 5 NAPLAN scores improved

Source: Parkville Global Advisory (2014). National Evaluation for the Low SES National Partnership and the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership - Impact Stage Final Report.

### ***Gonski funding: Making a difference for ATSI students***

In states and territories where additional Gonski funding has been delivered to schools, it is demonstrably making a difference for schools and ATSI students. For example:

***Mossman State School, Queensland:*** Mossman has approximately 50% Indigenous students and has received an additional \$74,000 invested into staffing in 2015. This is leading to

increased attendance, improved NAPLAN results, and more students meeting targeted goals in individual curriculum plans.

***Woree State School, Queensland:*** In 2015, Woree has been able to invest an additional \$319,000 into staffing that is enhancing the school's focus on explicit teaching of reading and writing. In the prep year, where 10 out of 21 students identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, children are jumping reading levels, school attendance has increased, and parents and the community are enjoying being involved in the school.

***Le Fevre High School, South Australia:*** Le Fevre has 20% Indigenous students. Gonski funding has enabled the hiring of extra Indigenous teachers and support staff for the Kaurna language program.

***Evans River K-12, New South Wales:*** Evans River has 13% Indigenous students. \$350,000 dollars in additional Gonski funding over the past two years have enabled the running of the Quicksmart numeracy program and the hiring of a music teacher for the first time. Kinder, Year 1, and Year 2 students are meeting or exceeding numeracy benchmarks.

### **Recommendations:**

- **That this inquiry advocates a genuinely national approach towards closing the access and achievement gaps between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in preschools and schools across the country.**
- **That this inquiry recognises (1) that closing these gaps requires closing the gaps in resources between schools and communities and ensuring that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including those in remote areas, are attending schools that meet minimum resource standards; and (2) that this requires the Commonwealth Government to commit to the full six year transition to the Gonski-based funding model contained in the Australian Education Act 2013 with State and Territory Governments fully meeting their funding obligations.**
- **That this inquiry investigates (1) the Northern Territory Government's failure to pass on \$272 million in additional Commonwealth funding to government schools and (2) budget cuts imposed by the Western Australian Government on its government schools despite receiving \$120 million in additional funding, and the impact of these political decisions on educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.**

## Access to, participation in and outcomes of pre-schooling

The AEU has long campaigned for universal free provision of early childhood education for all three and four year old children, with priority access to two years high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education for all three and four year old ATSI children.

Across the board we welcome significant improvements in this area, one which had long been marred by under-resourcing and significant disparities between the level and quality of provision between the states and territories, particularly for the most disadvantaged.<sup>19</sup> These improvements are largely associated with the commitment by governments to a series of National Partnership Agreements aimed at providing universal access to quality Early Childhood Education for all children in the year before full time schooling, with a particular focus on increasing the participation rates of Indigenous and developmentally vulnerable children.

The development and implementation of the reforms was informed by a strong body of national and international evidence on the importance of quality programs in the early childhood years to a child's social and educational development, with flow-on benefits to better health, education and employment outcomes later in life, and the long-term disadvantage for children without access to quality early childhood programs. In addition to the significant short and long term individual benefits for children, and for families, the research establishes that there are long-term cost benefits associated with investment in the provision of universal access to quality ECE which will pay significant national dividends in the future.

We would urge the Inquiry to take note of the OECD's strong focus on the importance of quality early childhood education programs in mitigating social inequalities and promoting better student outcomes overall, but particularly for disadvantaged students. Their analyses show that sustained public funding is critical for supporting the growth and quality of early childhood education programmes.<sup>20</sup> Further, that in most countries, fifteen-year-old students who had attended at least one year of pre-primary education tend to perform better on the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment [PISA] tests than those who had not, even after accounting for pupils' socio-economic background. They note that PISA research also shows the relationship between pre-primary attendance and performance tending to be stronger in school systems with a longer duration of pre-primary education, smaller pupil-to-teacher ratios in pre-primary education, and higher public expenditure per child at the pre-primary level (OECD 2013a, Table II.4.12).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Successive annual OECD *Education at a Glance* reports show that Australia's level of investment in pre-primary education is substantially below the OECD average, and that despite recent increases in the levels of enrolment and overall investment this remains the case.

<sup>20</sup> OECD (2014), *Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing. p.322

<sup>21</sup> OECD (2014), "Indicator C2: How do early childhood education systems differ around the world?" in *Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing. p.322  
[http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933118333\\_EaG2015](http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933118333_EaG2015)

Despite these improvements, issues of access, participation and outcomes for Indigenous children remain a concern, and the targets set for preschool/early childhood have not yet been met. In relation to remote communities, the 2015 'Closing the Gap' Prime Minister's report notes that 85 per cent of Indigenous children in remote communities were enrolled compared to the target of 95 per cent.<sup>22</sup>

The recent report of the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning confirmed the importance of quality ECE but noted the inequitable disparity in access and outcomes particularly for disadvantaged children and significant numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children:

*Finding 5.1 Generally, Australian children are doing well developmentally and most are well prepared to begin formal schooling. Those who are less well prepared tend to be Indigenous children, children living in socio-economically disadvantaged communities, children living in very remote areas and children from non-English speaking backgrounds. There is likely to be overlap across these groups.*<sup>23</sup>

The failure to achieve Indigenous enrolment targets requires serious attention, given the well-established value of early childhood education and the long-term disadvantage for children without access to quality early childhood programs, particularly in remote localities. It is, as argued by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, "fundamental to attempts to reverse the historic and continuing health, social, economic and political disadvantages (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children) face."<sup>24</sup>

The AEU urges this Inquiry to take account of submissions to the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Child Care and Early Childhood Learning which specifically address these issues. The submission by the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care identified significant barriers to Indigenous participation in early childhood education and care, including:

- a lack of transport;
- prohibitive fees;
- unmet cultural or support needs of families;
- fear of racism or children being judged, or that early childhood settings will undermine Aboriginal culture; and

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<sup>22</sup> Australian Government (2015), *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report*, p.10

<sup>23</sup> Productivity Commission (2014), 'Childcare and Early Childhood Learning', Inquiry Report Volume 1, No 73, p50

<sup>24</sup> Hutchins, T., Martin, K., Saggars, S. & Sims, M. (2007) *Indigenous Early Learning and Care*. Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) 9. Cited in Secretariat of National Aboriginal And Islander Child Care. (2014) Submission to Productivity Commission Inquiry into Child Care and Early Childhood Learning. p.4. Downloaded from <http://www.snaicc.org.au/policy/dsp-landing-policyarea.cfm?loadref=194>

- lack of ATSI staff, few staff fluent in local Indigenous languages and insufficient cultural competency training for staff.<sup>25</sup>

Redressing these barriers is consistent with the elements of best practice ECE shown to be effective in maximising enrolments and outcomes for ATSI children, as detailed in the Commonwealth's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Universal Access Strategy, including:

- employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in services with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children;
- transport for children to attend programs and for families to attend meetings, if required;
- a culturally and linguistically appropriate and welcoming environment;
- early childhood education program for three year old children;
- no fees, or minimal fees;
- active family and community engagement/involvement;
- incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in the program;
- displaying culturally appropriate art and designs at the preschool;
- recognising and celebrating cultural events, such as NAIDOC Week; and
- culturally appropriate excursions.<sup>26</sup>

The AEU believes these remain benchmarks of best practice and suggests this Inquiry revisit the Universal Access to Early Childhood Education for Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children strategy document endorsed by the (then) Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs.

The AEU's own Early Childhood Education policy also highlights the need for ECE to provide for the intellectual, cultural, social and emotional development of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children; recognise that central to learning for Aboriginal children is a focus on identity and self-determination and belonging; and for the delivery of care and education to be culturally inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogies.

Providers of early childhood education services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children should:

- Ensure staffing policies give priority to appropriately qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are enrolled;
- Adopt measures to include and appropriately remunerate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members delivering cultural programs;
- Provide professional development activities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness and counter racism for all staff;

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<sup>25</sup> Hutchins, T., Martin, K., Saggars, S. & Sims, M. (2007) *Indigenous Early Learning and Care*. Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) 9. Cited in Secretariat of National Aboriginal And Islander Child Care. (2014) Submission to Productivity Commission Inquiry into Child Care and Early Childhood Learning. p.4. Downloaded from <http://www.snaicc.org.au/policy/dsp-landing-policyarea.cfm?loadref=194>

<sup>26</sup> MCEECDYA. op.cit. p.7



- Appropriate and sensitive cultural orientation to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is a prerequisite for all workers in all children's services;
- Adopt teaching practices which recognise, value and utilise the student's first languages; and Aboriginal English/Kriol and Torres Strait Islander Kriol;
- Develop and implement programs which increase the proficiency of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the use of Standard Australian English, recognising this as essential to full participation in broader Australian society;
- Provide environments in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents feel welcome and encouraged to be involved in the education program;
- Adopt practices which maximise the co-ordination of early childhood education programs with health services and nutrition education programs.<sup>27</sup>

We draw the Inquiry's attention to Queensland's successful 'Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives in Early Childhood' program (Box 1) which exhibits a number of these characteristics.

### **Box. 1 Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives in Early Childhood (EATSIPEC)**

EATSIPEC is a Queensland Department of Education and Training program that has been delivered with 430 participating kindergartens, engaging 1,100 participants. The program is staffed by seven early years teachers and seven community engagement officers.

Participants have been supported to engage in self- reflection, build their cultural competency and connect with local community.

The EATSIPEC team deliver a suite of professional workshops with kindergarten staff to help foster culturally safe spaces. The teams work with kindergartens on curriculum matters and cultural understanding and these are linked to quality improvement plans and national standards.

The families of ATSI children have been able to connect with a community engagement officer. This person helps to establish the idea of a services hub, and could support families to access Centrelink, provide administrative support with enrolments and attending to other services.

The officers inspire reciprocal relationships between communities and kindergartens. The result has been increased enrolments in early childhood programs that help ATSI children to be school ready, and the longer term effect of this is that children and their families engage in school and cross transitional milestones (ECEC – primary – middle school – beyond).

An example of the reciprocal relationship is that kindergartens understand when children are away on Sorry Business, but families also understood the importance of regular attendance at kindergarten.

<sup>27</sup> AEU, Early Childhood Education Policy, 2015

**Recommendations:**

- **That the national partnership on universal early childhood education that funds 15 hours preschool education per week in the 12 months prior to full time schooling be made permanent rather than subject to funding renewal every two years, as is currently the case.**
- **That priority attention be given to achieving the Closing the Gap target of 95% Indigenous enrolment in preschool education across all regions of Australia.**
- **That closer attention be given to the advocacy and implementation of best practice ECE measures shown to be effective in maximising enrolments and outcomes for ATSI children.**

## **The provision of boarding school education and its outcomes**

Boarding schools have long played a role in the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The issue has come to prominence in recent years due to advocacy of boarding school education as a solution to longstanding problems in Indigenous education, despite there being limited contemporary research into their efficacy.

Historically, boarding schools serving ATSI students have existed in both the public and private sectors. Examples include the Wiltja Program in South Australia,<sup>28</sup> and the Worowa Aboriginal College in Victoria.<sup>29</sup>

The Wiltja Program houses male and female students from the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands at residences in Adelaide's northern suburbs, from which they attend academic and vocational classes at two government secondary schools.

The program grew out of initiatives that facilitated Anangu students to study in Adelaide in the 1980s and produced its first South Australian Certification of Education graduates in 1998. Since then 44 students have completed their secondary education at Wiltja. Retention rates have risen markedly over time, attendance levels of students at school on a daily basis sits at above 98 per cent, and the numbers of long-term male students has risen by approximately 50 per cent.

The students are predominantly from the APY Lands and more than twenty remote communities across the Central and Western Desert regions of South Australia and closely neighbouring Anangu communities in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. English is their second or third language.

The program is directly governed by Anangu communities and resourced by the South Australian Department of Education and Child Development. The Commonwealth supports students' boarding costs via Abstudy payments.

The Worowa Aboriginal College, a boarding school for young Aboriginal women in years 7-10, was established in 1983. Located in Healesville north-west of Melbourne, the school is largely funded through government grants and Abstudy allowance, charging minimal fees. It is Victoria's only independent Aboriginal community school, and the only boarding school in Australia that caters exclusively to Aboriginal girls who come from Aboriginal communities in urban regional and remote Australia.

More recently, the program which has attracted the most attention is that of the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation (AIEF). Since 2008 the AIEF has provided scholarships for Indigenous students to attend elite non-government schools. In 2014 it supported 410 secondary students at boarding schools in several states. Much has been made of its graduates' attainment levels which compare favourably with indicators for Indigenous students and indeed the overall student population.

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<sup>28</sup> Information available at <http://www.wiltja.jasicdesign.com.au/>

<sup>29</sup> Information available at <http://www.worowa.vic.edu.au/>

In the Northern Territory, the 2014 Wilson Review of Indigenous Education has recommended the expansion of boarding school facilities as part of the concentration of secondary schooling into Darwin and six other centres. The review was primarily focussed on remote Indigenous education in response to poor educational outcomes; low enrolment, attainment and achievement. It found remote schools struggling to provide the full range of secondary education and limiting their students' aspirations, including by providing VET programs based only on local employment options. Despite some success stories and the best efforts of those working in them, the review found these schools produced 'a minimal return for a significant investment.'<sup>30</sup>

Before the work of the AIEF or the recommendations of the Wilson review are used to justify a broader shift towards boarding schools, thorough investigation of both is required.

### ***The Australian Indigenous Education Foundation***

The AIEF is able to point to impressive retention and post-school outcomes among the students it sponsors, but these need to be put in context. AIEF scholarship recipients are likely to be among the highest performing students in their local schools. Participating schools select Indigenous students on the basis of their likelihood to succeed, with being likely to complete Year 12 as one of the selection criteria.

AIEF participants study in a privileged environment where peer effects are likely to be positive for academic achievement.<sup>31</sup> They are also assigned a mentor, usually an employee from one of AIEF's corporate partners, and receive extensive support from the program's transition support team.

This favourable learning environment is supported by a mix of public and private funds. In the year to March 2014, AIEF's scholarship program received \$10 million in government funding, and another \$18 million from private sources and investments. AIEF received \$32 million from the Australian Government between 2009 and 2014 and another \$37 million from private sources.<sup>32</sup>

AIEF's average net scholarship cost is around \$19,000 per student per annum. Average government funding (state and Commonwealth) per Australian school student was \$10,783 in 2013 (the most recent year for which school finance data is available on My School). For Independent and Catholic schools that AIEF-sponsored students attend, average combined government allocations are lower (\$4,773 and \$9,538 per student respectively) although these schools raise larger amounts through fees and other sources. In work for the Gonski Review in 2011, the Australian Council for Educational Research calculated targeted funding public schools receive for enrolling Indigenous students under state funding formulae. The amounts

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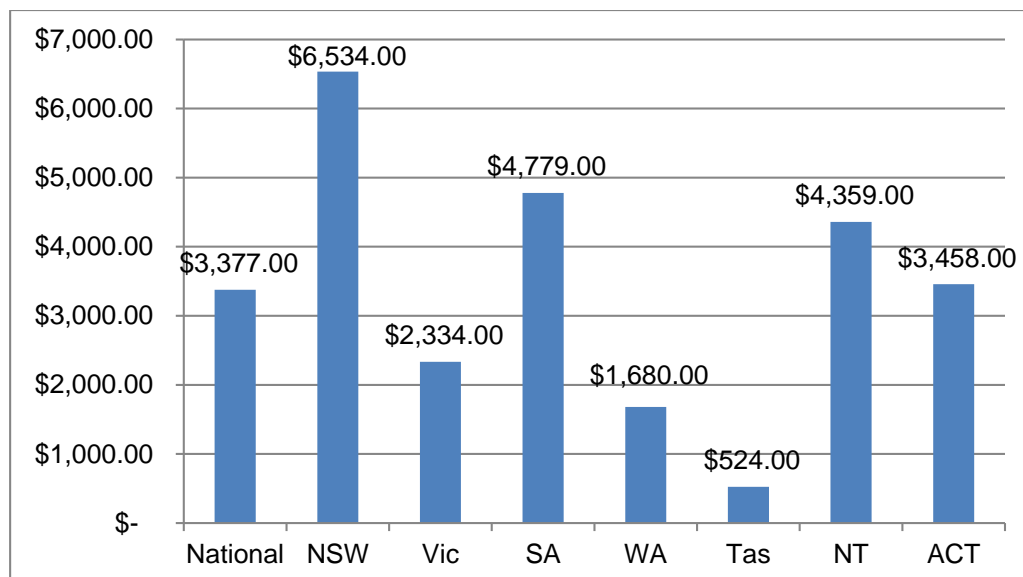
<sup>30</sup> Northern Territory Government. (2014) *A Share in the Future: Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory*. p.142

<sup>31</sup> Somewhat ironically, one consequence of these students completing their secondary studies at boarding schools is to remove any positive peer effect of their attendance in their local community.

<sup>32</sup> Australian Indigenous Education Foundation (AIEF). Annual Report 2014.

vary widely, as can be seen in Figure 3, with a national average in 2011 dollars of \$3,377 per student.<sup>33</sup>

**Figure 3. Indigenous students - average targeted funding per targeted student, government schools 2009-2010**



Source: Australian Council for Educational Research (2011) Assessment of current process for targeting schools funding to disadvantaged students: A report prepared for the Review of Funding for Schooling panel (p.42)

Quite clearly, the cost of supporting a student through the AIEF exceeds the average per student public funding paid to a government school to educate an Indigenous child.

There is no doubt the AIEF can point to positive indicators and individual success stories among the students it sponsors. However before endorsing the AIEF model or recommending any expansion in its operation, or similar schemes, this inquiry is duty bound to fully investigate whether the generous public and private subsidies directed to a relatively small group of students and the private boarding schools they attend, via the AIEF, is a most optimal allocation of resources.

### ***Northern Territory Shift to Boarding Schools for Secondary Provision***

The 2014 Wilson Review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory found students enrolled in secondary programs in remote schools are often:

*... (o)nly minimally literate, largely disengaged from school, attending sporadically, looking forward to the end of their schooling with little prospect of gaining a formal qualification and in many cases without a realistic chance of gaining worthwhile employment locally.*<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> AIEF. op.cit.

<sup>34</sup> Northern Territory Government op.cit. p.141

Year 9 literacy rates in schools classified as very remote, as measured by proportion of students reaching NAPLAN minimum national standards, hover around 10 per cent, although in schools classified as remote they are around 60 per cent. Year 7 to 12 apparent retention rates are in the 20 per cent range for very remote students compared to the mid to high per cent range for all Indigenous students and the mid-70 per cent range for non-Indigenous students. In 2013, only 24 students in very remote secondary programs completed the NT CET.<sup>35</sup>

While the Wilson Review used these statistics to frame a startling picture of the state of secondary schooling for remote Indigenous children, it made something of a leap in recommending boarding schools in regional centres as the appropriate response. While acknowledging that the history of boarding and residential arrangements “has not generally been effective” the review’s final report recommended most secondary and all senior secondary education in the territory be provided at schools in Darwin, Taminmin, Palmerston, Alice Springs, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy utilising boarding and other residential facilities.<sup>36</sup> The review’s draft report had recommended cutting off all education delivery in remote communities at the end of Year 6 but changed this after strong resistance from communities, including the Central Land Council, which believed it not tenable to expect children as young as 11 to leave home for schooling.<sup>37</sup>

The case as to why boarding school is the appropriate response to undoubtedly poor educational outcomes for remote secondary students is not made in the Wilson Review report. It is presented as if it logically follows from the fact that there is a problem and that current arrangements represent a “minimal return on investment.”<sup>38</sup>

The review did acknowledge anxieties about children studying long distances from their homes. A number of desired criteria for boarding facilities are discussed in the report, although not included in the recommendations. These include:

- facilities being located within three hours traveling time;
- close engagement between facilities, families and communities;
- facilities to have Indigenous staff members, preferably drawn from communities with which students are familiar; and
- facilities being required to include residential accommodation for parents and community members during visits.<sup>39</sup>

Trials of residential facilities were recommended for Tennant Creek and other sites with the involvement of volunteer families and communities, and with a clear intention that secondary provision in remote communities would progressively cease as the urban schooling policy is implemented.

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<sup>35</sup> Northern Territory Government op.cit.

<sup>36</sup> Northern Territory Government op.cit. p.143

<sup>37</sup> Northern Territory Government op.cit. p.144

<sup>38</sup> Northern Territory Government op.cit. p.142

<sup>39</sup> Northern Territory Government op.cit. p.148

## *Issues with the Northern Territory's Approach*

In their response to the draft report, Dr Bill Fogarty and Professor Mick Dodson strongly took issue with the review's approach. They accused Wilson of ignoring "a plethora of evidence, stretching back to the 1960s, that demonstrably shows that this approach is not a developmentally, educationally or socially productive model for the majority of Aboriginal students from remote regions."<sup>40</sup>

### *Lack of genuine consultation*

Fogarty and Dodson's key criticism is that the cessation of secondary provision in remote communities as proposed would entail no consultation with local communities over how best to address poor outcomes and make boarding school their only option:

Choice to access residential and boarding facilities as an educational option should be exactly that: a choice. Furthermore, such a choice should be made as an educationally and socially informed decision by parents and community members. It should not be mandated by what education administrators believe is the best for Indigenous students, nor should it be made as a result of the withdrawal of alternative services.<sup>41</sup>

This resonates with evidence received by the AEU from elders in remote Indigenous communities concerning community backlash against the boarding school proposals, which highlights our general concerns regarding the importance of community consultation and working together in genuine partnership on Indigenous educational issues.

Time after time, reports draw attention to the negative consequences associated with lack of consultation. Most recently the 2015 'Social Justice and Native Title Report' lamented the fact that:

*... the failure at the core of many of the problems that emerged during the IAS [Indigenous Advancement Strategy] funding round was the lack of engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples about the design and implementation of the IAS processes. Proper engagement may have pre-empted many of the issues that subsequently arose. Information sharing is an important element of engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities but it is not a substitute for a consultation process that gives our people the opportunity to have input into the policies that affect us.*<sup>42</sup>

Similarly, the growing concerns of Homeland/outstation residents in relation to being excluded from policy development about their futures are addressed in a paper by Sean Kerins, 'The Future of Homelands/Outstations' for the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (ANU). Kerins points out that, in addition to the lack of evidence to guide

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<sup>40</sup> Fogarty, B. & Dodson, M. (2014) *Submission to the Northern Territory Indigenous Education Review*. p.4. [https://ncis.anu.edu.au/\\_lib/doc/NT\\_education\\_review\\_submission.pdf](https://ncis.anu.edu.au/_lib/doc/NT_education_review_submission.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> Fogarty and Dodson op. cit. submission p.4

<sup>42</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, *Social Justice and Native Title Report. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner*, October 2015 p21. See also p26.

policy development for Homeland/outstation education, innovative initiatives undertaken by Homeland/outstation residents are not being given due attention:

*There is little longitudinal research to guide the development of evidence-based policy for homeland/outstation education. The data that do exist in State and Territory systems is extremely patchy, often not disaggregated from 'hub-school' data, and fails to account for disparities in the levels of funding and service provision to homeland/outstation schools.*

*Homeland/outstation residents report three main reasons why education outcomes in their communities have been relatively poor: inadequate funding; the education is not relevant to the lived reality of [their] communities; and low teacher retention rates.*

*Despite this, individual homeland/outstation communities continue to develop innovative mechanisms for learning on country. While this takes a variety of forms across remote Australia they share the common theme of community-controlled education.<sup>43</sup>*

We urge the Inquiry to give due attention to the importance of consultation and the consequences of inadequate consultation, noting that the United Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is very explicit about their inclusion in decision making that affects them:

*Article 18: Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision-making institutions.*

*Article 19: States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them.<sup>44</sup>*

### **Further shortcomings**

Fogarty, Dodson and Dr Melissa Lovell expanded on the shortcomings of the Wilson Review's conclusions in a 2015 paper for the National Centre for Indigenous Studies at the ANU.

They criticise the Review's reliance on NAPLAN as a diagnostic instrument, and the assumption that the success of reforms will be judged by future NAPLAN results, for ignoring research findings that positive outcomes for Indigenous education are related to a

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<sup>43</sup> Sean Kerins, 'The Future of Homelands/Outstations', Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences. CAEPR Topical Issue No.1/2010 [http://caepr.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/Publications/topical/Topical\\_Kerins\\_outstations\\_0.pdf](http://caepr.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/Publications/topical/Topical_Kerins_outstations_0.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> AHRC, Social Justice and Native Title Report 2015, op.cit. p38



broader approach to learning that incorporates community involvement, Indigenous knowledge and local development aspirations.<sup>45</sup>

Such approaches are at odds with educational research which shows that positive educational outcomes occur when training and educational development is appropriately linked with communities' needs and development goals (Catts & Gelade 2002; McRae et al. 2000; Miller 2005). One major study for instance, found positive outcomes for Indigenous education relied on a range of factors including: community ownership and involvement; the incorporation of Indigenous identities, cultures, knowledge and values; the establishment of strong partnerships with communities; the capacity to be flexible regarding course design, content and delivery; the quality of staff; and the availability of extensive student support services (Miller 2005:18). The literature is also unequivocal in stating that Indigenous knowledge and pedagogic design must form a central component of educational and pedagogic design (Altman & Fogarty 2010; Anderson 2003; Fogarty & Schwab 2012; Fordham et.al. 2010; Henry et.al. 1999; Kral 2010; O'Callaghan 2005; Schwab 2006).<sup>46</sup>

In addition to the Review's acknowledgment that the approach they advocate has not generally been effective, and the lack of a supporting research base, it is surprising that the Wilson review mandates boarding schooling, given the controversial history of removal of Aboriginal children from their families. The Bringing Them Home report documented the dislocation and emotional toll that resulted from having to send Indigenous children to boarding schools. Fogarty, Lovell and Dodson contend that given this history and the importance of community and family to Indigenous people, requiring students to enrol in schools hundreds of kilometres from home will actually lead to lower enrolment and retention.<sup>47</sup>

The authors also raise the issue of whether the remote schools that are accused of 'failing' have been given fair opportunity to do their job. Most of the communities which would lose secondary provision under Wilson's recommendations have only had it for the past ten years and in that period it has been substantially underfunded compared to schools in Darwin.<sup>48</sup>

Underfunding of remote NT Indigenous communities, and particularly schools, is a matter of record. The major contributing factor has been the territory's policy of funding on attendance, while it receives school funding from the Commonwealth Government based on enrolment numbers. Lower attendance figures mean remote schools serving Indigenous students have to provide facilities and teachers for all students they enrol but are not funded for them. Further,

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<sup>45</sup> Fogarty, B., Lovell, M., Dodson, (2015) A view beyond review: Challenging assumptions in indigenous education developments. UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts, Vol. 4(2). p.7

<sup>46</sup> Fogarty, B., Lovell, M. and Dodson, M. op.cit. p.7

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Fogarty, B., Lovell, M. and Dodson, M. op.cit. p.9

despite having the most unequal education outcomes in the country, the NT does not employ a needs based formula for distributing funding and staffing schools.<sup>49</sup>

The Wilson Review was an opportunity to look into funding inequities and recommend a fairer deal for remote schools. Instead the final report declared secondary provision by these schools a failure and precipitously called for their closure and the wholesale shift to a disruptive boarding school model.

The Wilson Review did not make a case for how boarding schools will improve outcomes for Indigenous secondary students. Its preference for this model appears to be driven by cost considerations and a belief, or hope, that attendance at boarding schools will increase retention and achievement on standard measures such as NAPLAN.

### **Recommendations**

- **That in any consideration of the performance of the Australian Indigenous Education Fund, this inquiry consider the effects of removing the most talented students from their local communities and conducts a cost-benefit analysis of the high per student subsidies paid through the scheme.**
- **That this inquiry (1) acknowledges shortcomings in the Northern Territory's plans for a wholesale shift towards boarding schools for secondary provision; and (2) recommends that wider application of this policy not proceed until several years of trials are held in the NT and the initiative is properly evaluated.**

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<sup>49</sup> Clark, M. (2014). *Northern Territory Review of Indigenous Education* article at <http://www.saveourschools.com.au/national-issues/northern-territory-review-of-indigenous-education>

## **Access to, participation in, and benefits of different school models for Indigenous students in different parts of Australia**

### ***Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy/Good to Great schools***

The CYAAA initiative was introduced into the Aurukun and Coen schools in January 2010 and at Hope Vale in January 2011. Under an agreement with the Queensland Department of Education and Training the three schools are governed by an independent board, chaired by local community leader Noel Pearson.

Curriculum is divided into three domains: class, club and culture. The culture domain involves study of Indigenous culture and language and club incorporates arts, music and sport. Culture is taught for half an hour each school day with a further hour and a half of combined club and culture being delivered outside normal school hours. Priority is given to the class component of the curriculum using a particular model of Direct Instruction (DI) promulgated by the National Institute for Direct Instruction based in the United States. English is the sole language of instruction in DI classes. Four to four and a half hours of each school day are spent learning literacy, language and numeracy (and science in upper grades) via Direct Instruction.<sup>50</sup>

Direct Instruction employs scripted lesson plans designed around small learning increments and clearly defined teaching tasks. Only 10% of each lesson is new material. The remaining 90% of each lesson's content is review and application of skills students have already learned but need practice with in order to master.<sup>51</sup> CYAAA chair Noel Pearson is an enthusiastic promoter of DI. He has advocated its wider implementation to address poor educational outcomes among Indigenous youth, resulting in the introduction of DI into more remote schools in the NT and Western Australia.

The enthusiasm of some of DI's supporters appears disproportionate to the strength of available supporting evidence. A comprehensive evaluation of the impact of the CYAAA on learning outcomes in the first two years of operation conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) failed to find that the change to a DI dominated curriculum had resulted in any acceleration in the pace of learning. In large part this was due to a high level of missing data from test results, in some cases as high as 70%.<sup>52</sup>

Attendance rates declined overall for CYAAA between 2010 and 2012.<sup>53</sup> This must have been quite a disappointment as the CYAAA runs in tandem with the Cape York Welfare Reform under which a Families Responsibility Commission is empowered to investigate

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<sup>50</sup> Australian Council for Educational Research. (2013). Evaluation of the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy Initiative. pp.16;18

<sup>51</sup> National Institute for Direct Instruction <http://www.nifdi.org/what-is-di/basic-philosophy>

<sup>52</sup> Australian Council for Educational Research. (2013). op.cit.

<sup>53</sup> Australian Council for Educational Research. (2013). op.cit. p.37

school truancy and can compel families to attend a conference and impose sanctions including income management.<sup>54</sup>

Interviews with teachers and community members revealed mixed views. A small number of teachers had observed improvements in reading and comprehension ability. Some teachers believed behavioural problems had decreased, an observation backed by data indicating fewer suspensions. Some community members disputed CYAAA accounts of higher levels of community engagement.<sup>55</sup> For reasons not given, the My School website only contains NAPLAN data on the CYAAA from 2013 and 2014, and these are not broken down among the three constituent schools. The available data from 2013 and 2014, the two years following those evaluated by the ACER study, shows mixed results. As can be seen in Table 4, mean scores in reading, one of the focus subjects of the DI method, declined for all year levels. There were some positives such as improvement in numeracy at every year level.

**Table 4. CYAAA mean NAPLAN results 2013-2014**

	Year 3			Year 5			Year 7	
	2013	2014		2013	2014		2013	2014
Reading	291	285		372	358		430	407
Persuasive writing	217	208		308	348		336	320
Spelling	270	280		383	426		448	445
Grammar and Punctuation	270	284		344	354		376	399
Numeracy	271	317		359	363		428	437

Source: My School 2015

NAPLAN data contained in Table 5 reveals increasing numbers of students below national minimum standards (NMS) in eight out of 15 cases from 2013-2014.

**Table 5. Percentage of CYAAA students below NAPLAN minimum national standards, 2013-2014**

	Year 3			Year 5			Year 7	
	2013	2014		2013	2014		2013	2014
Reading	33	39		42	52		48	56
Persuasive writing	65	66		69	74		65	85
Spelling	65	45		52	17		55	50
Grammar and Punctuation	49	37		55	70		71	65
Numeracy	55	24		72	74		50	39

Source: My School 2015

<sup>54</sup> McQuire, A. *Seven Years Of Noel Pearson Trials Have Led Aurukun To The Bottom Of The National Heap*. New Matilda 24/7/15 <https://newmatilda.com/2015/07/24/seven-years-noel-pearson-trials-have-led-aurukun-bottom-national-heap/>

<sup>55</sup> Australian Council for Educational Research. (2013). op.cit.

Comparisons generated by My School show that CYAAA students did not achieve any better results on average than schools with student bodies with similar backgrounds. CYAAA has the lowest student:teacher (7.5) ratio of all schools included in these comparisons (average 10.5). Given this low ratio and the fact that staffing costs make up the bulk of schools budgets, it is surprising that CYAAA receives below average recurrent funding per student (\$17,631) relative to the similar schools group (\$ 24,047), although it is possible that the My School figures do not take account of additional funding the CYAAA receives outside of normal funding allocation methods.

The facts presented here counter some of the claims of the CYAAA itself and its promoters. An article in The Australian newspaper on 22/7/2015 titled 'Noel Pearson's radical teaching plan passes first test' claimed that 'hard data' indicates 'how a radical experiment in remote education is transforming three Cape York schools.' The journalist had been provided with research by the Queensland Education Department. This contained NAPLAN results broken down for the three schools (unavailable on My School), which showed in 2014 'all Year 3 students at Hope Vale performed above national minimum standards in numeracy and reading.' If this were true, figures on My School which show 78% of Year 3 CYAAA students performing at or below NMS (Levels 1 and 2) for reading would probably mean all students at Coen and Aurukun are achieving at these levels. This would be a terrible outcome for the two schools that have been part of CYAAA the longest.<sup>56</sup>

The Australian article does acknowledge that 'results across all three Cape York Academy campuses are more varied' but fails to disclose results for all three schools. Unfortunately selective reporting and boosterism is characteristic of much coverage of CYAAA. The voices of those pointing out that student achievement has not improved at CYAAA, or voicing criticisms of the DI method have been side-lined. This has distorted perceptions of how effective the CYAAA and DI are, leading to the take up of the model in remote Northern Territory and Western Australian schools.

This inquiry must take an objective look at the record of CYAAA and consider valid critiques of DI.

### ***Critiques of Direct Instruction***

Addressing the 2014 Wilson Review of Northern Territory Indigenous Education's endorsement of Direct Instruction, Fogarty, Lovell and Dodson from the National Centre for Indigenous Studies write:

*Mandating the adoption of particular programs such as Direct Instruction...increases central department control of schools in remote areas. It also decreases the ability of local teaching staff to respond to the particular circumstances of remote communities, or to implement programs that might accord with local parent and community values and learning preferences.*<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Robinson, N. 'Noel Pearson's radical teaching plan passes first test.' The Australian. 22/7/2015

<sup>57</sup> Fogarty, B., Lovell, M. and Dodson, M. op.cit. p.15.

Further, they contend, the push towards DI contributes to the de-pedagogising and de-professionalisation of teachers, which is at odds with a body of educational research on best practice approaches to positive educational outcomes for Indigenous students.<sup>58</sup>

The AEU has recently surveyed members working in remote schools using DI in Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia and it is clear that DI is not as positive and straightforward as its advocates would have it.

**Box 2. Concerns about Direct Instruction held by teachers using the method in remote schools.**

"The script for the program I am teaching (RMSE Language K) is diabolical! I have serious concerns about the DI approach as a method for teaching English as a second language to these students. It isn't contextual and it's presented in a very tricky way. Most of my concerns are around the script itself."

"It is an American program and some of the language in it isn't used in an Australian context i.e. waste basket, in back of the rock, alligator, bulletin board, etc."

"The language encountered is often tricky i.e. the frog is in front of the dog, the frog is not in front of the dog, if it is made to take you places it is a vehicle, a fence is not a vehicle, the bird that is next in line should be red."

"Tense: This is a particularly difficult area for all of our students and the way it is presented in the script is very problematic i.e. Where is your hand? Where was your hand? Today is \_\_\_\_\_. The next day will be tomorrow. What day is it tomorrow?"

"I don't believe this program is suitable for these students at all. Where is the research that shows it is successful?"

"My students are progressing so slowly in reading, but could be doing much more in terms of writing. Many of the provided independent task ideas are also not relevant to my students. The program does not give them this opportunity since we are not supposed to go above and beyond what is dictated by NIFDI."

"The language book is in American i.e. words included are 'in back of' for behind, discussing dimes, inches and squirrels. The student work book is basic colouring in (year 3 are doing this!). The reading book is also very American, having students sound out mum as mom.... There is no opportunity to focus on handwriting skills and fine motor development."

"They DO NOT like it at all. Our kids need quick enjoyable movement and specific creative tasks - they are unable and do not want to sit in a chair for one and a half hours listening and repeating. These kids are creative with good English - this program has ruined their love of learning and our behaviour and attendance rates and student engagement, as well as community dis-connection, are at an all-time low."

<sup>58</sup> Fogarty, B., Lovell, M. & Dodson, M. op.cit.

<sup>59</sup> Luke, A. (2013) *On Explicit and Direct Instruction*. <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/63824/1/explicit.pdf>

Professor Alan Luke, formerly of the Queensland University of Technology, has trained in and taught Direct Instruction. He believes that while it can lift performance in basic skills, so can other methods and the narrowing of curriculum and deskilling of teachers that follows from adopting DI as a total curriculum solution, as is the case at CYAAA, excludes other approaches that have shown to be effective in educating Indigenous children: quality classroom instruction and student/teacher cultural relations, teacher capacity and professionalism, and a strong engagement with and knowledge of local communities, cultures and languages. Luke does not rule out direct instruction or similar methods of explicit instruction as having a role to play but writes that these need to be ‘part of a larger school level approach and broader repertoire.’<sup>60</sup>

Curriculum narrowing is certainly a consequence of CYAAA’s DI-dominated model. During normal school hours the only lesson that isn’t DI-based basic skills instruction is a half hour of culture studies. A number of responses to the AEU survey also noted that curriculum offerings outside DI-taught basic skills had been curtailed, with some respondents noting a linkage between this narrowing and DI’s emphasis on rote learning and repetition with increased levels of boredom and disengagement among some students, and with a number of teachers expressing a desire to leave the service as a consequence of the implementation of DI.

Proponents of Direct Instruction acknowledge it leads to narrowing of curriculum but claim it is the unavoidable price of lifting levels of literacy and numeracy. However, as pointed out earlier, there is no solid evidence base for these claims on the basis of the results from Australian schools where DI has been in use for almost five years.

### ***Stronger Smarter Schools***

The Stronger Smarter Learning Communities project grew out of the work of Dr Chris Sarra who oversaw improvements in achievement and attendance when principal of Cherbourg High School in Queensland. The Stronger Smarter Institute provides a variety of training and support including a 12 month leadership program for schools with significant Indigenous enrolment.

According to an evaluation conducted for the then Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) in 2013, the major premise of the Stronger Smarter approach is that schools should establish a baseline environment which explicitly names, recognises and displays elements and messages about and from Indigenous identities, cultures and communities. Schools that have participated in the Stronger Smarter program tend to exhibit higher levels of both Indigenous staffing and leadership and community engagement and involvement in school governance, which have been strongly linked with evidence on improving Indigenous educational outcomes.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Luke, A. (2013) *On Explicit and Direct Instruction*. <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/63824/1/explicit.pdf>

<sup>61</sup> Luke, A et. al. (2013) Summative Evaluation of the Stronger Smarter Learning Communities Project. (Paper for SSLC Project Committee, Queensland University of Technology and Australian

High expectations of Indigenous students are also a pillar of the Stronger Smarter approach.

The DEEWR evaluation found that Stronger Smarter schools are successful in reshaping school cultures to reflect a positive sense of cultural identity. Teachers in schools where leaders have been trained in the Stronger Smarter approach report significantly more instructional time allocated to embedding Indigenous content, knowledges and topics in the curriculum than teachers in other schools. Still, these schools are not an exception to the general trend of increased emphasis on learning basic skills as the proportion of Indigenous students increases. While there is no evidence as yet of a systemic positive effect on NAPLAN scores, the authors suggest that “the pathway of translating ‘high expectations’ into conventional achievement gains works (or does not) separately from school community engagement and community and increased teacher cultural knowledge and engagement.”<sup>62</sup>

Within the larger cohort of Stronger Smarter schools studied by the DEEWR evaluation, four that exhibited statistically significant gains in test scores for Indigenous students across all year levels and subjects were identified. Common characteristics of these were identified as:

- a strong emphasis on understanding, engaging with and acknowledging the cultural and linguistic resources of Indigenous students and communities;
- a strong emphasis on Indigenous staff and leadership within the school and engagement with the community; and
- a strong emphasis on building teacher capacity and quality pedagogy across the curriculum through whole-school curriculum planning in key areas.<sup>63</sup>

The Stronger Smarter approach has demonstrated that it can help schools forge a culture with these characteristics which translates into improved results for their students.

Lucy Ockenden’s 2014 paper, ‘Positive learning environments for Indigenous children and young people’, prepared for the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare/Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, contains information which would be of value to the committee. The paper summarises recent studies into Indigenous schooling models and initiatives and finds that common characteristics of schools that are more effective for Indigenous students include:

- Strong and effective school leadership.
- A positive school culture that encourages care and safety among students and staff, as well as a positive sense of Indigenous identity.
- Teachers with the skills and knowledge to effectively engage and develop relationships with Indigenous students.
- High levels of community involvement in the planning and delivery of school processes, priorities and curricula.<sup>64</sup>

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Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.  
<http://eprints.qut.edu.au/59535/>

<sup>62</sup> Luke, A. et.al. op.cit p. 27

<sup>63</sup> Luke, A. et.al, op. cit. p.38

<sup>64</sup> Ockenden op.cit. p.2.



Based on findings from a number of studies, Ockenden identifies an effective school culture as one that:

- promotes and values Indigenous culture;
- allows Indigenous students to feel safe, welcome and valued at school;
- supports Indigenous students and families; and
- is based on high expectations of both staff and students.<sup>65</sup>

She stresses that a critical component of an effective school culture for Indigenous students is the provision of “a school environment that is free from racism and one in which Indigenous students feel safe and welcome.”<sup>66</sup> Table 6 summarises her findings.

**Table 6. Successful learning models for Indigenous students**

<p><b><i>Personalised Learning Plans</i></b></p> <p>PLPs have been shown to enhance student engagement and motivation. The Commonwealth Government’s ‘What Works. The Work Program’ is a strong advocate of their use. PLPs should be developed in consultation with students and their parents and based on a diagnosis of each student’s learning and an understanding of their personal situation.</p> <p>The ‘What Works. The Works Program’ advises that characteristics of effective PLPs include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Whole school ownership and commitment to PLPs</li> <li>- Driven by strong school leadership</li> <li>- A range of formal and informal diagnostic tools used to profile each student’s progress</li> <li>- Specific, measurable and achievable goals</li> <li>- Allocation of time for development of PLPs</li> <li>- PLPs are not seen as an add on, but part of teachers’ core duties</li> <li>- Collaboration with Indigenous parents, carers, support staff and agencies</li> <li>- Provision of initial and ongoing professional learning support for teachers</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Keeping Indigenous Kids at Secondary School (KIKASS)</i></b></p> <p>This support program run at Bairnsdale Secondary College in Victoria with support from The Smith Family aims to encourage Indigenous students to stay at school longer, develop leadership skills, build a strong connection to their community and learn skills they find relevant. The program encourages participation in Indigenous arts, music, sports, dance and drama. It also facilitates greater parental and community engagement. Support has three components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Individual scholarships</li> <li>- Personalised support to help students identify goals for schooling and beyond</li> <li>- Activities to increase students’ self-esteem, teamwork and leadership skills</li> </ul> <p>The period KIKASS has been in place has seen attendance of Year 9 and 10 Indigenous students increase from 20% to 80%.</p>

<sup>65</sup> Ockenden op.cit. p.10.

<sup>66</sup> Ockenden op.cit. p.10

**Deadly Ways to Learn Project**

This entailed a series of collaborative forums to develop two way bi-dialectical teaching practices with the aim of enhancing literacy levels among Indigenous students. Teachers were paired with Australian Indigenous Education Officers at 14 Western Australian schools.

The underlying concept was to promote equality between Standard Australian English and Aboriginal English. The project pushed a message that students whose whole language or dialect is not standard Australian English require support with the standard curriculum and should not feel they have to abandon their home dialect.

A case study by 'What Works. The Work Program' included a project coordinator's observations that outcomes included:

- Literacy progress
- Awareness by students of alternative dialects and attempts at code switching
- Awareness of the value and role of Australian Indigenous Education Officers
- More inclusive teaching practices

Source: Ockenden, L. (2014) Positive learning environments for Indigenous children and young people. Closing the Gap Clearinghouse

Addressing Indigenous educational disadvantage is a vexed question and has been addressed with many more policies and ideas than those discussed here. For most of these, particularly those that have been backed by government funding, formal evaluations have been carried out. What is noticeable is that there is no 'silver bullet' answer, despite attempts by the backers of some models to make it appear so.

The DEEWR Review of Stronger Smarter concluded:

*Part of the historical and current problem in the reform of Indigenous schooling has been the policy search for a single intervention, policy lever or program that will 'solve' the problem once and for all.<sup>67</sup>*

The AEU recommends committee members heed this caution in their considerations for this inquiry. Evidence of a successful model that can 'fix' poor outcomes across the board does not exist. What does exist are local examples of engaging learning environments, which with sustained resourcing and support can make a difference to attendance and learning outcomes.

**Recommendations**

- **That given the absence of evidence linking the introduction of Direct Instruction at the Cape York Australian Aboriginal Academy to improved learning outcomes, this not be promoted as a model for education of ATSI students.**
- **That this Inquiry looks closely at the schools and schooling models identified in the 2013 DEEWR evaluation of the Stronger Smarter project and the 2013 paper 'Positive learning environments for Indigenous children and young people' prepared for the National Institute for Health and Welfare, in its consideration of improving Indigenous attendance and learning achievement.**

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<sup>67</sup> Luke et.al op. cit. p.38.

## Engagement and achievement of students in remote areas

As we have stated throughout this submission, one of the cornerstones of student engagement and achievement is genuine community engagement and the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be active participants in all areas of decision making, including their education.

The Commonwealth's 'What Works. The Work Program' identified school-community partnerships as one of the seven key attributes of improving remote schools with high proportions of Indigenous students. It observed both formal and informal partnerships, concluding that "when schools and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities work in partnership, students get better results from their education."

Elements of effective community engagement observed by the study include

- engaging in authentic two-way dialogue based on a shared vision, positive relationships and respect for cultural identity.
- recognising families as first educators and welcoming them into the school, using various forums designed to ensure the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice is heard in the school.
- connecting leadership within the school and leadership within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, often through principals using key community members as mentors.
- establishing partnerships and relationships that describe the school vision and ways of achieving it.
- providing purposeful and appropriate ways for Indigenous Education Workers (IEWs) to act as a bridge to the community.<sup>68</sup>

Examples of successful community engagement provided in the study which warrant further investigation by the Inquiry include:

***Shepherdson College, Elcho Island, NT*** – Two community elders and two strong women are employed to mentor the college director, and all classes supported by Yolngu staff.

***Ernabella and Mimili Anangu Schools, Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands, SA*** – A formal agreement gives Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara Education Council operational control of education on APY lands. School governing councils have a strong role in determining educational decisions and it provides a model of genuine community empowerment.

***Menzies Remote Community School, WA*** – The school maintains regular contact with parents to address issues like behavioural problems. It runs breakfast and 'sip and crunch' programs, and provides literacy and numeracy information sessions for parents.

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<sup>68</sup> What Works. The Work Program (2012) Success in remote schools. p.18

***Yarrabah State School, near Cairns, QLD*** – Community programs are provided on school grounds including computer classes. The school maintains consultative forums with students, P&C, and a local consultative committee comprised of staff, parents and community members, as well as with elders, service providers and the shire council.<sup>69</sup>

A recently published evaluation of the Arnhem Land Learning on Country Program found increased community involvement in school activities is delivering a sense of local ownership and empowerment and leading to increased attendance and improved employment pathways.<sup>70</sup>

Key to successful engagement is two-way dialogue, or as the Stronger Smarter Institute puts it, schools “working with communities, not doing things to community.” Engagement cannot be a list of tasks to be ticked off but genuine interaction and mutual respect between school staff and community. School leaders and teachers also need to understand that community has a broader meaning for ATSI people than just parents and carers, encompassing grandparents, elders and extended families. It is also necessary to recognise that parents may have negative feelings towards education rooted in their own experience or not feel confident talking to teachers. It is important that there is respect on all sides for ATSI and non-Indigenous ways of thinking and approaches to education.

The Stronger Smarter Institute emphasises that engagement is not just the responsibility of leaders but a hallmark of effective teaching in Indigenous communities. Building links in the community should flow from strong relations with students and should involve teachers getting out of schools and talking to parents and others, not waiting for them to come to the school. Teachers should receive training and support to build their capacity to do this work.<sup>71</sup>

### ***Indigenous languages in schools***

An informed consideration of student achievement and engagement in remote areas must take into account the issue of Indigenous languages in schools.

The importance of language learning in Indigenous communities, particularly the role of bilingualism in education and Indigenous languages in assisting student learning, has been validated by well-established national and international research and documented in previous submissions to government inquiries. It has been effectively summarised by Charles E. Grimes in his short straightforward compilation of the vast body of research showing the benefit of students receiving instruction in their first language, which highlights the deficiencies of the Northern Territory’s approach in this area.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> What Works. The Work Program (2012) op.cit. p.32

<sup>70</sup> What Works. The Work Program (2012) op.cit. p.32

<sup>71</sup> Stronger Smarter Institute (2015) Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs, Inquiry into Educational Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

<sup>72</sup> Charles E. Grimes, ‘Indigenous languages in education: what the research actually shows’, Australian Society for Indigenous Languages, Inc. 2009. <http://www.ausil.org.au/node/3741>

UNESCO's 'Global Monitoring Report on Education for All, 2010', states:

*The degree of alignment between home and school language has a critical bearing on learning opportunities. Children who study in their mother tongue usually learn better and faster than children studying in second languages (UNESCO Bangkok, 2008; Woldemikael, 2003). Pupils who start learning in their home language also perform better in tests taken in the official language of instruction later in their school careers (UNESCO Bangkok, 2008). The benefits extend beyond cognitive skills to enhanced self-confidence, self-esteem and classroom participation (Alidou et al., 2006).<sup>73</sup>*

In Australia, a 2008 report by the Australian Council for Educational Research, 'Indigenous language programs in Australian schools – a way forward', identified a growing body of research evidence showing:

Well-designed bilingual programs are academically effective and do not hold back students' acquisition of English. Research suggests that if literacy is established in a child's first language, it is easier to switch to another language. Research also suggests that childhood bilingualism enhances cognitive ability by promoting classification skills, concept formation, analogical reasoning, visual-spatial skills and creativity gains.<sup>74</sup>

Research in 2009 by Simpson, Caffery and P McConvell on bilingual education over many years has shown that young children learn best when taught through their mother tongue. The research has also shown that there are positive effects on children's cognitive development if they are encouraged to become strong bilinguals. They note also that policy-makers seem to fail to recognise that children who are monolingual in a language other than English need explicit teaching of the English language, by trained English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers, before they can learn through English as the medium of instruction.<sup>75</sup>

Children who are first educated at school in their own language have a capacity for learning English when introduced at around the age of eight years which is significantly better than for those children who were not taught in their own language and who are expected to learn English at school entry.

This is supported by a literature review conducted by NT DET in 2010 which demonstrated that by the middle and high school years the bilingually schooled students reach the same levels of achievement as those schooled all in English and over time outperform the monolingual-schooled students. Bilingual education is not only beneficial to students' education. Bilingual education is valued by local communities because it ensures the survival

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<sup>73</sup> Stronger Smarter Institute (2015) Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs, Inquiry into Educational Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

<sup>74</sup> Purdie, N. (2009). A way forward for Indigenous languages. Australian Council for Educational Research. Research Developments Volume 21

<sup>75</sup> Jane Simpson, Jo Caffery, and Patrick McConvell AIATSIS Discussion Paper Number 24 <http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/research/docs/dp/DP24.pdf>

of languages and because it provides an honoured place for Indigenous languages in the curriculum and an honoured place for Indigenous teachers.<sup>76</sup>

The teaching and maintenance of Indigenous languages in schools is essential to maintain culture. It shows that schools acknowledge and respect the value of the child's language and culture, and thus the child's Indigenous identity. This requires a level of action that goes beyond 'recognising' the importance of language teaching and 'acknowledging' the degree to which Indigenous languages being spoken today are in real danger of dying out in the absence of funded and resourced implementation of the measures that have been shown to work from the existing numerous studies and reports.

The AEU supports the maintenance and revitalisation of ATSI languages. Enabling Indigenous children to be strong in their own cultures and languages plays a significant role in ensuring high mainstream educational outcomes, including fluency in Standard Australian English (SAE). We believe students who have an Indigenous language or dialect as their first, second or third language should attract appropriate ESL support and funding and call for well-resourced, appropriately staffed bilingual education programs, where communities choose to support bilingual programs in local schools.

It is not necessary to downgrade the teaching and use of Indigenous languages, as has occurred at the Cape York Academy which prioritises Direct Instruction in American English.

Learning an Indigenous language and becoming proficient in the English language are complementary rather than mutually exclusive; rather than acting as a barrier to the learning of English, bilingual programs actually strengthen it (provided of course they are adequately supported and resourced).

This brings us to a consideration of staffing in schools educating Indigenous students. Although Indigenous students comprise 5% of the school student population, only 1.2% of teachers claim Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status.<sup>77</sup> Given the weight of research indicating a positive Indigenous culture and strong Indigenous leadership is associated with better learning outcomes, there is a real need to attract more Indigenous teachers into the profession. Unfortunately, data from recent years shows a decline in the number of Indigenous Education Graduates from 271 in 2008 to 202 in 2011.<sup>78</sup>

### ***Attracting Indigenous Teachers into the Profession***

Teachers in remote schools are more likely to be younger and less experienced. There is a need to attract more Indigenous high school graduates into teaching and experienced, high quality teachers to work in remote schools serving Indigenous students. Accordingly, the

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<sup>76</sup> NT DET, *Literacy for Both Worlds*. Retrieved December 2010 from NT DET: [http://www.det.nt.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/628/LiteracyForBothWorldsPolicy.pdf](http://www.det.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/628/LiteracyForBothWorldsPolicy.pdf)

<sup>77</sup> Australian Government. (2014) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Analysis: More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative. p.5

<sup>78</sup> Australian Government. (2014) op.cit. p.28

AEU endorses the policy action recommendation from the DEEWR Review of Stronger Smarter that:

*The state systems and teachers' unions negotiate systems of professional and financial incentives to retain experienced and high quality teachers and principals in rural and remote schools with high percentages of Indigenous students.*<sup>79</sup>

Given this need, the AEU is disappointed at the decision of Curtin University to discontinue its Bachelor of Education, Regional and Remote, course offering. This course is tailored for Indigenous teachers from rural and remote communities. The format of delivery enables students to remain in their communities for much of the year, travelling to Perth for intensive blocks of study. This course is helping address underrepresentation of Indigenous teachers and high turnover of staff in rural and remote schools and should be continued and expanded. All Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs must include quality, authentic, purposeful instruction that engages with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. ITE programs must deliver professional learning opportunities for pre-service teachers to understand the importance of culturally appropriate curriculum and teaching practices. Graduates should leave university with the skills to provide all students with an understanding of Indigenous culture and history with a view to promoting reconciliation.

Serving teachers and school staff must be provided with ongoing professional development that helps them achieve best practice in education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. As well as imparting cultural competency, this should include teaching techniques and schooling models shown to be effective for Indigenous students.

### ***Indigenous Education Officers***

It is important that committee members have a full understanding of the work done by what are referred to as Indigenous Education Officers, although their exact title varies across states. State education department employees based in schools, their exact roles can vary but typically involve supporting students and community engagement. Duties can involve running breakfast clubs, monitoring attendance, being available to talk to students and acting as liaison between school and Indigenous community. Knowing what is going on in the local community and working with other agencies are key parts of IEOs' work.

There are hundreds of IEOs doing this challenging but crucial work in schools across the country; supporting students to get to school, stay there, and achieve their best. The AEU encourages members of the committee to use the inquiry to gain a better understanding of the role of IEOs, speak to them and discover how they can be supported in their work.

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<sup>79</sup> Luke et.al. op.cit. p.43

## **Recommendations**

- **That professional and financial incentives be improved in industrial agreements to attract and retain experienced and high quality teachers to rural and remote schools serving Indigenous communities.**
- **That Curtin University reinstate its Bachelor of Education, Regional and Remote course offering and other universities be encouraged to run teacher education courses that prepare candidates for teaching in rural and remote schools with higher proportions of Indigenous students.**
- **That all initial teacher education courses include content that gives candidates an understanding of the importance of culturally appropriate curriculum and school culture.**
- **That the current inquiry takes the vital work done by Indigenous Education Officers into consideration in the course of its investigations.**